

Rebecca LeHeup**Food Tourism Destination Expert**

Fáilte Ireland has the pleasure of working with Rebecca LeHeup in the context of her food destination expertise. In 2011, Rebecca came to Ireland and met with some of our destination groups, sharing with them the vision, road map and priorities in becoming a food destination. She impressed all who listened to her with her international perspective, food tourism knowledge and approachable style which led to some very productive sessions resulting in inspired food champions within the regions, who are working tirelessly to improve the food experience for our visitors.

Rebecca LeHeup's only mission is to make people feel at home in Ontario by eating a little local food. In fact, the [Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance](#) (OTCA) is an organisation made up of 24 restaurant, hotel and hospitality organisations (with a total membership exceeding 10,000 establishments) dedicated to the idea that tourists might like to eat food from Ontario, when they're in Ontario. LeHeup explains: "We're staying focused to work with communities throughout the province, so that local sustainable agriculture can form the base of Ontario tourism."

LeHeup sees OCTA's role as comprising three main areas. First, developing the infrastructure for culinary tourism, which is everything from cold storage facilities to distribution networks – just getting the food available to her membership. Second, she works aggressively to identify the natural assets that communities have, but may not realise. Third, LeHeup wants all Ontario regions to be "market ready", which means being able to tell their stories on a national and international level.

LeHeup is the executive Director of [Taste the County](#), an organisation that promoted culinary tourism in Prince Edward County. Her success with such projects as the Taste Trail, a series of tourist friendly signs and maps showing wineries and good food attractions, helped make the County one of the province's fastest growing destinations.

LeHeup has clocked thousands of kilometres around the province and spoken at countless events explaining to anyone who will listen why culinary tourism is good for everyone: the hospitality industry, producers, and tourists – you name it. It seems to be working, as more interest is raised and menus increasingly add local fare and communities find innovative ways to celebrate local foodways. Though LeHeup is certainly not ready to rest on her laurels – there is much, much more to be done she insists – she is clearly enjoying her work and can't wait to help out at the next festival or feast.